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ZNR UUUUU ZZH (CCY CCY ADX4FB646 MSI3466-623)
R 081244Z APR 09
FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2609
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 2800
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 5047
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 2665
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 3291
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 3440
RHMFIUU/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

UNCLAS ASHGABAT 000436

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN, SCA/PPD, IIP, ECA

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (GARBLED TEXT)

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: MARCH MEDIA REACTION - MEDIA PRAISE GROWING
TURKMEN-US RELATIONSHIP

¶1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

¶2. (U) SUMMARY: In March, media favorably and accurately covered events reflecting U.S.-Turkmenistan cooperation in education and health care, and highlighted various U.S. visits. The visit by USAID Regional Director William Frej in early March, and USAID projects in Turkmenistan received wide and accurate coverage. The state media also accurately covered educational delegations from Harriman Institute of Columbia University and American University in Bulgaria. END SUMMARY.

USAID REGIONAL DIRECTOR'S VISIT, MOSTLY WELL-COVERED

¶3. (U) On March 10-11, RFE/RL Turkmen Broadcast service carried accurate interview pieces with visiting USAID regional director William Frej. On March 10, RFE/RL website carried an article (English) based on the radio story, in which Mr. Frej was quoted misleadingly out of context, implying that medical care for mothers and children is in a critical state in Turkmenistan, while the intention was to note the high level of attention paid to this issue by the government and USAID programs. Upon embassy request, RFE/RL added slightly more context and reposted the article. Overall, the article accurately outlined USAID projects in Turkmenistan and hailed its activities in the country. The following day, "The Times of Central Asia" (English) reprinted the RFE/RL article. On March 17, "Turkmenistan" TV channel (Russian, Turkmen, English, Chinese, Arabian, Persian, French) carried an accurate report on the visit, highlighting an interview with Frej and USAID Country Representative. The TV program gave a broad image of USAID-implemented projects in Turkmenistan and praised the growing U.S.-Turkmenistan relationship.

MEDIA HIGHLIGHT USAID PROJECTS IN TURKMENISTAN

¶4. (U) On March 13, Azeri News agency "Trend" (English), posted an article based on the Embassy press release about USAID-organized training on March 12 to raise Avian Influenza response capacity in Turkmenistan. The same day, Kyrgyzstan-based "CA-NEWS" (Russian) reprinted the exact content of the same press release. The following day, the government-run website "Turkmenistan - Golden Age" (www.turkmenistan.gov.tm) (Turkmen, Russian and English) also

posted an accurate article about the event. On March 16, state-run dailies "Neytralniy Turkmenistan" (Russian, circ. 47,091) and "Turkmenistan" (Turkmen, circ. 36,091) reprinted the web article.

15. (U) On March 24, the government-run website "Turkmenistan - Golden Age" (www.turkmenistan.gov.tm) (Turkmen, Russian and English), based on an Embassy press release, carried an accurate and lengthy article about USAID's conference dedicated to World Tuberculosis Day in Turkmenistan. The article gave accurate details on the event and accurately quoted the U.S. Charge d'Affaires. The following day, state-run dailies "Neytralniy Turkmenistan" (Russian, circ. 47,091) and "Turkmenistan" (Turkmen, circ. 36,091) reprinted the web article. On March 25, "Turkmenistan" TV channel (Russian, Turkmen, English, Chinese, Arabian, Persian, French) carried a short report on the event on its ten minute news program. The following day, the TV channel carried a separate feature-length story on the event. The program praised the state health policy and emphasized USAID's role. The story featured interview remarks by Turkmen representatives at the event, but omitted interview remarks by the U.S. Charge d'Affaires and USAID Country Representative. The TV channel gave no explanation for cutting U.S. officials' remarks.

MEDIA PRAISE US-TURKMEN EDUCATIONAL EXCHANGES

16. (U) On March 23, the government-run website "Turkmenistan - Golden Age" (www.turkmenistan.gov.tm) (Turkmen, Russian and English), state-run dailies "Neytralniy Turkmenistan" (Russian, circ. 47,091) and "Turkmenistan" (Turkmen, circ. 36,091) and "Watan" TV evening news program (Turkmen) gave brief and accurate report on the visiting American University in Bulgaria (AUBG) delegation. The following day, the independent news website www.turkmeninform.com (Russian) also posted an article on the visit. On March 26, state

newspaper "Watan" (Turkmen, circ. 31,691) gave a short report on the visit. On March 24, "Watan" TV news program (Turkmen) accurately highlighted the delegation's meeting with the students and faculty of Turkmen State University. The news story carried interview remarks by the AUBG president, who expressed willingness to establish contacts with the Ministry of Education of Turkmenistan for educational exchanges. On March 26, "Turkmenistan" TV channel (Russian, Turkmen, English, Chinese, Arabian, Persian, French) accurately highlighted the delegation's meetings at the Turkmen State University and the Institute of International Affairs. The program featured interview remarks by the delegation members, professors from the universities and Embassy's Public Affairs Officer. On March 31, "Turkmenistan" TV channel (Russian, Turkmen, English, Chinese, Arabian, Persian, French) accurately highlighted the delegation's meeting at Turkmenistan's Ministry of Education with follow-up interview remarks by AUBG's president.

17. (U) On March 12, the government-run website "Turkmenistan - Golden Age" (www.turkmenistan.gov.tm) (Turkmen, Russian and English) carried a short introduction on delegations from the Harriman Institute at Columbia University and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The following day, state-run dailies "Neytralniy Turkmenistan" (Russian, circ. 47,091) and "Turkmenistan" (Turkmen, circ. 36,091) reprinted the web article. Independent news website www.turkmeninform.com (Russian) also carried a news piece on Columbia University delegation's visit, based on state media reporting. On March 16, "Watan" TV evening news program (Turkmen) accurately highlighted the Columbia delegation's visit to Turkmen State University, followed with interview remarks by the delegation members. The March 17 article in state-run daily "Neytralniy Turkmenistan" (Russian, circ. 47,091) praised education exchange opportunities between the United States and Turkmenistan. The following day, another state weekly "Mugallymlar gazet-i" (Teachers' newspaper) (Turkmen, circ. 94,091) carried an article praising the cooperation between Columbia University and Turkmen State University.

STATE MEDIA COVERS U.S. CSIS REPRESENTATIVE'S MEETINGS WITH GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS OF TURKMENISTAN

18. (U) On March 17, "Watan" TV evening news program (Turkmen) accurately highlighted a visit by senior fellow of U.S. Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) Mr. Edward Chow. The following day, the state-run dailies "Neytralniy Turkmenistan" (Russian, circ. 47,091) and "Turkmenistan" (Turkmen, circ. 36,091)

gave a short introduction on the visit and Mr. Chow's meetings. On March 24, "Turkmenistan" TV channel (Russian, Turkmen, English, Chinese, Arabian, Persian, French) carried accurate interview with Mr. Chow, where he spoke about the purpose of his visit and his assessment of Turkmenistan's oil and gas prospects.

STATE TV NEWS PROGRAM CARRIES U.S. CHARGE D'AFFAIRES INTERVIEW
DURING TREE PLANTING CAMPAIGN

¶9. (U) On March 14, "Watan" TV news program accurately carried interview remarks by Charge d'Affaires regarding a tree planting campaign, attended by President of Turkmenistan. During the interview the Charge stressed the importance of initiatives such as planting trees.

STATE TV CHANNEL HIGHLIGHT THE VISIT OF THE HEAD OF "FIT
INTERNATIONAL" COMPANY FROM USA

¶10. (SBU) On March 26, "Turkmenistan" TV channel (Russian, Turkmen, English, Chinese, Arabian, Persian, French) carried accurate story on "Fit International" company's visit. The story introduced the purpose of the visit, and highlighted meetings at different ministries of Turkmenistan. In his interview remarks, the head of the company praised Turkmenistan and expressed readiness to expand cooperation in education, tourism and sports. He also praised business opportunities for American investors in Turkmenistan. (NOTE: "Fit International" is affiliated with the "Friends of the Turkmen" a group which has independently cultivated ties with the

Turkmen government. END NOTE.)

¶11. (SBU) COMMENT: The past month saw continued success in gaining positive coverage of Embassy events, particularly USAID programs, in both state and non-state media. A year ago, USAID's World TB event was recorded by state TV, but never aired, perhaps due to the sensitive nature of the topic. Thus, this year's coverage, even without U.S. interview remarks, represents improvement. In addition, state media reps continue their open contact with the Public Affairs Section, requesting interviews with official visitors or simply to fish for new stories. RFE/RL's correction of their web story (para. 3) represents the second time that an embassy request for a correction was honored. END COMMENT.

MILES